

Memorandum of Conversation

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DATE: April 27, 1962

SUBJECT: Germany and Berlin

PARTICIPANTS: Anatoli Dobrynin, Ambassador of the USSR
Georgi M. Kornienko, Counselor of Soviet Embassy

The Secretary
Foy D. Kohler, Assistant Secretary

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After some preliminary remarks which included references to the thickness of the dossiers accumulating on this question, to the Khrushchev interview with Look editor Cowles, and to the public exchange between Foreign Minister Gromyko in his Supreme Soviet speech and the Secretary in his press conference, the Secretary said that he had wanted to have a further talk with Ambassador Dobrynin prior to his departure for various alliance meetings. He said that he would be talking in London and Athens with the allied Foreign Ministers and wanted to see before this whether Mr. Dobrynin had any further pertinent information from Moscow. Mr. Dobrynin replied that Messrs. Khrushchev and Gromyko had stated the position of the Soviet Government but that if there was any special clarification he could give the Secretary, he was prepared to do so. The Secretary referred in particular to Gromyko's reference to the American statement that it saw no obstacles "to combining free access to West Berlin with the demand to respect GDR sovereignty." He said that this had required some clarification which he had given in his press conference yesterday. After the Ambassador had explained the text and the word "demand" in the sense of a proposal the Secretary accepted that this was probably not a point for present dispute.

The Secretary then said he thought the question arose as to how these matters might best be discussed and he would make some preliminary comment on this subject. He reviewed the vital interests of the West in the Berlin situation: the presence of our forces and of access to West Berlin and the freedom of West Berlin to have whatever arrangements with others which were important

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important to its continued free life and viability. These were the more immediate questions and then there were broader ones. He referred to Gromyko's comment on the fact that there is some interdependence between progress on disarmament and progress on Berlin. In this connection he wanted Mr. Dobrynin to know that the United States was very serious in its approach to the disarmament question; this was equally true as regards nuclear testing and the United States would be happy to sign a satisfactory agreement on this subject, for example, this afternoon. Other broader questions about which he had talked with Mr. Gromyko in Geneva included the questions of diffusion of nuclear weapons, of boundaries and of nonaggression. The American side had repeatedly said that if the question of the vital interests could be disposed of, we considered that the others would easily fall into place. He observed, however, that Mr. Gromyko had repeated a demand for an end to the Occupation as an essential condition and if this were so, then Mr. Gromyko's reference to obstacles in the way of an agreement was an understatement. On the question of access, both sides had put up proposals for an International Access Authority. Perhaps some progress could be made if these were discussed on the basis of the essential needs on both sides. He pointed out that the United States had tried to take into account the fact that the USSR had put forward over several years public positions with respect to Germany and Berlin. He pointed out that the United States had also made proposals. It was clear that these proposals on both sides were unacceptable and he had discussed with Mr. Gromyko in Geneva the question of how we manage a state of disagreement. This was why the United States had put forward its working paper on "Draft Principles" which had deliberately omitted certain points of interest to both sides but provided a means for continuing to try to talk out these disagreed matters. The Secretary said frankly he did not see how we could be expected to go much further without knowing where we stand on the central issues. As he had told Mr. Gromyko, the matter of diffusion of nuclear weapons was a US national policy which we applied even to our own allies, with the single exception of the UK which had been an original partner with us in atomic development. In general, therefore, we found ourselves in a situation where the broader range of questions was subject to some movement and improvement. This brought us down to essential elements which were really, in the case of Berlin, the matter of our presence there and, in the case of disarmament, the question of verification. These were the keys which would unlock a whole series of possibilities. For the moment he would leave aside the disarmament aspect. He could, of course, repeat all that we had said in many conversations about our presence in West Berlin, but the Ambassador already knew our position. After the Ambassador confirmed that he did, the Secretary commented that since Mr. Dobrynin was a new participant in these talks perhaps he could bring some fresh air into them. Laughing, Mr. Dobrynin observed that he had his instructions. He then went on to say

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that he understood the Secretary was not directly linking the problems of Berlin and of disarmament. The Secretary confirmed this was the case and Dobrynin said that similarly the USSR was not linking the two. He said he thought the relationship between them had been made very clear in Mr. Khrushchev's statement. The Secretary agreed that this was essentially our own interpretation.

Turning to the German question, the Ambassador said that he really had nothing new. He could of course go into detail on all the Soviet positions but these were already quite familiar to the Secretary. However, he would emphasize that his instructions made clear that there was no change in the Soviet position on the question of West Berlin, the status of the city and access to it. He then quoted the statement in Mr. Khrushchev's interview and Mr. Gromyko's speech that the Soviet Union could not accept an agreement continuing the Occupation status in West Berlin and the presence of Western troops there. This was indeed the main question. He did not know whether this was a light or a serious obstacle. However he stressed again that his instructions were very clear.

The Secretary replied that he might clarify the position. He referred to his remark to Mr. Gromyko that the Germans had once made us Allies and that he hoped that they might not now make us enemies. After Mr. Dobrynin had interjected agreement, the Secretary asked rhetorically: what does this mean? He then answered that if the Russians said they cannot forget 50 years of history, this we could understand. We have shared in that 50 years of history. However, the Secretary thought that Moscow had not sufficiently weighed and appreciated what it means to have the Federal Republic integrated into Western Europe, a Western Europe very closely linked with the United States. In broad historical terms, after 500 years the time had come when the possibility of intra-European wars was gone. This was a matter of uncommon interest to the security of the USSR. No longer would there be in Western Europe the intrigue, the rivalries, and the conflicts which had set off the two world wars. Also, the Secretary continued, there was a great element of stability when 15 nations were associated as we are in the Atlantic Alliance. The possibility that 15 partners could generate aggressive appetites and that any one of them could dominate them is simply nonexistent. If he were a political scientist, he would point to the "political inertia" which such arrangements involve. The Secretary said he thought it was also important that the Soviets understand that we really believe that the presence of the US in West Berlin is in itself a stabilizing factor so long as the Germans remain divided. Until the German problem as a whole is resolved, the reuniting of the country remains unfinished business from the point of view of German nationalism. Unless this situation is handled very carefully it holds great dangers for both sides. He said when the Soviets

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used the term revanchists they apparently mean anyone who seeks German reunification. However, in the sense of the possibility of German nationalism moving off by itself, this is a matter about which we are also concerned. We are also sincerely convinced that the general attitude of Western Europe as a whole is that of a genuine desire to move toward more normal relations with Eastern Europe and particularly with the USSR. President Kennedy had spoken to Chairman Khrushchev on this in Vienna and he was sure that the Soviets themselves had direct evidence of this from such Western statesmen as Spaak and Fanfani who had visited them. The Secretary suggested that Moscow should think in terms of the state interest of the Russian people and not let such questions as Berlin get caught up in ideological warfare. Both the US and the USSR had a mutual interest in normalizing the situation and in getting on to the great tasks of which Chairman Khrushchev had spoken. We genuinely do not believe Gromyko's statement that the absence of a peace treaty creates "a serious danger of conflict" between us in Central Europe. Until there is a long-term settlement of the German problem--and he recognized that this might take a long time--he saw no reason why there should be such danger unless the Soviets were determined to get us out of West Berlin. If this were the case, then he would agree that the situation was indeed dangerous.

Ambassador Dobrynin replied that he appreciated the Secretary's comments on the last 50 years. He would be inclined to agree that it was difficult to see Western Europe initiating a war. However, he would point out that at the end of World War II there was really a different world-power situation. Formerly, there were various power centers in Western Europe but since World War II, there are only two great powers. It is not a matter of conflict between the French and the UK, for example. Consequently, he would agree with this formulation. What he could not agree with was the Secretary's suggestion that the situation within Europe was not the number one problem. On the question of Western troops in West Berlin, this was something which the Soviet Union could not accept and he spoke with deep conviction as a Russian. At present the relations between the US and the USSR are "very bad"--or he would correct himself to say at least not as normal as the Soviets would wish. In present circumstances the confrontation of our troops involves dangerous possibilities of clashes. If, for example, Western troops should leave West Berlin, then there would just be a USSR and an East Germany and a West Germany. As the situation stands at present, two little boys getting into a conflict involves two big boys. He did not understand why we considered our presence in West Berlin so important. It would be impossible to explain convincingly to an ordinary Russian why US troops must be in West Berlin. It was an open secret that the troops of the Allies had come to Germany as Allies and conquerors. However, US troops had remained there against Soviet interests and in opposition to the Soviet Union. He did not understand how continued presence of our troops in West Berlin could be a vital interest to us. As long as they remained, there would be incidents and statements

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and ups and downs in the situation. Except for this problem, there was nothing that divided us in our relations except the general problems of disarmament and, perhaps, outer space.

The Secretary replied that it was true that the US and USSR had almost no strictly bilateral problems, other than such things as a Lend-Lease settlement and some aspects of trade. The problems between us all arise out of what might happen to someone else. If all the members of the UN really felt secure, there would be no problems and there would be nothing for us to fight about. If we could move forward to such stabilization gradually, then the relationship between the US and the USSR would become increasingly normal. The Secretary stressed that he could not agree that direct contact of the troops of responsible governments contributed to the dangers of the situation. He was not sure that a "no-man's land" between us would as yet be safe for either side. It was better to have Soviet and American troops confronting each other, rather than East and West Berlin Police.

Ambassador Dobrynin cited the situation in Korea as an analogy and expressed the opinion that this was a small problem. The Secretary replied that we had broken contact in Korea, and this had led to war. Dobrynin indicated he did not agree with this remark. He said the Soviets sincerely believe that the situation in Germany, after so many years, cannot remain unchanged. West Berlin is a permanent irritation, a point where clashes may happen at any time. The United States seems to want to wait. If someone were ill, he did not think that a prolongation of the illness helped toward a cure. The Secretary asked whether the Ambassador was recommending suicide as a cure. The Ambassador replied that we should agree to surgical operation. The Secretary recommended that if it is a real German settlement which is in question, then we are prepared to talk about this. The lack of a real German settlement seemed as abnormal to us as the situation in West Berlin to the Soviets.

The Ambassador then said that if the United States had really wanted a united Germany, it could have had this earlier on a neutral basis. Many people in Washington had understood this but the U.S. Government had always sought a unified Germany united with the West against the USSR. No Soviet Government could remain in power if it accepted a reunified Germany which was thus united with the West against the Soviet Union. Now it would be more difficult to arrange a neutral Germany since it was doubtful whether the East and West Germans themselves would accept. However, this was in the past and the US had ended the possibilities then existing by the creation of "Bizonia". The Secretary recalled that events at that time in Germany were taking place in the light of what was happening in Eastern Europe in violation of agreements. When the Soviets say that the time has come, after seventeen years, to draw a line under World War II, this apparently means that they want to get us out of West Berlin while they do not get out of

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East Berlin and East Germany. Ambassador Dobrynin commented that it would be better for the US to be in West Germany and the Soviets in East Germany. The Soviets recognize both states but the US was unwilling to accept the GDR. The US would never convince the Russians that what the US was doing in West Germany was not the same thing the USSR was doing in East Germany. The GDR is a separate State and has the right to enjoy the prerogatives of sovereignty. The Secretary replied that the Soviet attempt to create what they called a sovereign State in East Germany was subject to our presence in West Berlin and our access thereto. The Soviets do not have the ability to create such a State because there is this defect in their title. Having said that, he repeated what he had said to Mr. Gromyko in Geneva: that we accept that the situation in East Germany is not going to change and that we are not going to interfere.

Ambassador Dobrynin said that the US, however, was coming to the Soviets and asking them to subscribe to the continued presence of its forces and the Occupation in West Berlin. The Secretary replied that we were not asking the Soviets for anything in this respect. We had the impression, however, that the Soviets were not reciprocating our attitude in not challenging the Soviet control in East Germany and in East Berlin. We had not pressed them for recognition of our rights in East Germany and East Berlin. The Ambassador repeated that the Soviets recognize both the Federal Republic and the GDR while the United States refused to accept the GDR. He did not understand why the United States could not accept the existence of the GDR and its sovereign right to have normal exercise of its prerogatives as respects such things as transit. The Secretary replied that this was easy for the Soviets because they wished to make permanent the division of Germany. He said he would now reciprocate Gromyko's advice to him that the Soviet proposals would be good for the US. We do not believe it is good for the Soviet Union or for anyone for the Germans to be divided. Even if the practical situation must continue for the time being, we believe it is important not to foreclose the question of reunification. Even Moscow has seemed to recognize this as a problem in its occasional statements about reunification being a matter for the Germans themselves. Mr. Dobrynin said he did not like to portray this as a black and white situation with the US for and the USSR against German reunification. However, the question now was when that could be. At present, the West Germans refuse even to talk with the East Germans. Moreover, he could assure the Secretary that the Western statesmen who had come to Moscow were not in favor of any early reunification. He could see no practical way to approach this question; besides, there was the question of what kind of united Germany. Even if by some miracle the two of us should decide that Germany should be reunified within six months, he was not so sure that a way could be found. The Germans are stubborn and there are two German States. The Secretary said that if we now say that we do not see how reunification can be accomplished, this is because the Soviets refuse to leave the matter to the German people. At the same time we

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recognized that this was not a matter over which either side wanted to go to war. However, he would point out that the situation as respects Berlin was the same as that involved in all of Germany. Ambassador Dobrynin disagreed with this, saying that we could not decide about all Germany, but that we could decide about Berlin. The Secretary interjected that we could decide nothing without our Allies. After acknowledging this interjection, Dobrynin continued that the Federal Government has nothing to do with West Berlin. The Soviets accepted that West Berlin was under Allied sovereignty. The Secretary commented that Dobrynin seemed to be saying that since the Three Powers had the authority, they could agree to give Berlin up. The answer to this question was positively, "no."

Ambassador Dobrynin commented that the Soviets were not necessarily against reunification but that no one could put forward a realistic plan which would be acceptable to both sides. As to West Berlin, he reiterated that this was a separate city. The Secretary admitted that it was unlikely that Chancellor Adenauer and Herr Ulbricht would agree at this stage. Then observing the time, he said that he had to go to the airport to meet Prime Minister Macmillan. He said that unless the Soviet Government had other ideas we must consider how we were going to talk about this matter which had its complications and could not be considered all at once. We had gone quite far to indicate that we considered agreement possible on some points, but we felt that no headway could be made on these unless we could come to grips with the central issues of presence and access. He therefore proposed that we discuss these matters further after his return. We could also consider the "Principles" paper. In this connection, however, he pointed out that the Soviet paper was quite different in kind since the Soviet paper put forward Soviet proposals on controversial points. Ours on the other hand was designed to show how we could handle a situation of disagreement. It was important for its omissions, such as our omission of any confirmation of the occupation. After his return, he hoped we could discuss our paper further. The Ambassador indicated agreement but referred to "the papers exchanged at Geneva". However, he wanted to point out that he could foresee no change within the next ten days in the Soviet position as regards the presence of Western troops. The Secretary replied that he did not foresee any change in our basic positions either.

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